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Chairman: Mr. Chowdhury ..... (Bangladesh)
later: Ms. Incera (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Costa Rica)
later: Mr. Chowdhury (Chairman) ..... (Bangladesh)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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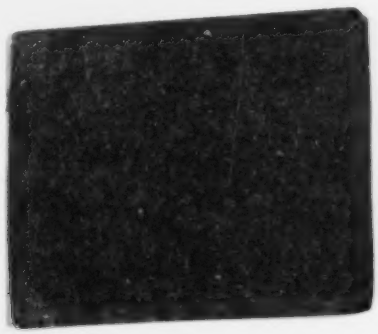

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 119: Pattern of conferences (*continued*) (A/51/946; A/52/32 and Add.1, A/52/215 and Add.1, A/52/216 and Add.1, A/52/291 and A/52/340 and Add.1; A/C.5/52/CRP.1)

1. **Ms. Fahmy** (Egypt) said that her delegation had noted the late appearance of documentation for some of the Main Committees. In the case of the Second Committee, the Chairman had been obliged to suspend a meeting because a report of the Secretary-General had not been available. When the Secretariat had suggested that the Secretary-General should present an oral report, most delegations had rejected that proposal. The introduction of so-called oral reports would have an adverse impact on the standard of debate, and the Secretariat must make documents available in time for delegations to discuss them and send them to their capitals for consideration. Her delegation agreed that the 20-page target must not be achieved at the expense of content and form. Reports must always be readable in all languages: that was the point in issuing them in the first place. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit on United Nations publications (A/51/946) had been printed in such a small font that it was impossible to read, and her delegation was unable to comment on it for that reason.

2. Her delegation had noted that the introduction of so-called "self-revision" had adversely affected the standard of translations into Arabic. Revisers had an indispensable role to play in translation into all the official languages, especially in ensuring consistency in the use of terminology. On a related matter, her delegation was still awaiting an explanation from the Secretariat of the abolition of the Arabic Language Coordinator and Arabic Language Teacher posts in Vienna.

3. In connection with the draft calendars of conferences and meetings for 1998 and 1999, her delegation had noted a disparity in the conference services provided to different meetings without being able to discern a clear pattern in the selection and allocation of those services. For most intergovernmental meetings there was no indication of what kind of records would be provided of the proceedings. While the meetings of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (item 2 in annex I to document A/52/32) were provided with summary records, those of the Working Group of the Commission on Human Rights on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (item 23) received no records of any kind. Similarly, the session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (item 44) was provided with summary records while that of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters (item 20) was not. Her delegation would appreciate an explanation from the Secretariat of the criteria used in determining what kind of services were to be provided.

4. Her delegation agreed that conference services must be provided for meetings of regional groupings, in implementation of General Assembly resolution 51/211 A. The absence of such services during the current session had had a negative impact on the level of participation in such meetings, and consultations in a number of the Main Committees had been hampered.

5. In connection with the results of the review carried out by subsidiary bodies that had not fully utilized their meeting entitlements (A/52/215 and Add.1), her delegation sought clarification from the Secretariat concerning the manner in which the replies received from the subsidiary bodies had been addressed. The Secretariat had, for example, taken full account of the considerations presented by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Commission on Population and Development, and it was to be assumed that the conference services provided to those bodies had thus not been affected. While her delegation thanked the Secretariat for its understanding of the nature of the work of those bodies, it nevertheless felt concern that the principle of respect for the special character of a body's mandate and work was not applied to others, such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. The latter performed a core function on behalf of the General Assembly in accordance with rule 157 of the Assembly's rules of procedure. It had indicated that it had a very heavy agenda and that conference services were not being underutilized. Nevertheless, according to the report, meetings were often held with less than the full complement of interpreters and with documentation in advance form and in English only. The report characterized that situation as representing cooperation with the Committee on Conferences, but her delegation was of the view that it was incompatible with the manner in which the Secretariat had addressed the considerations presented by other bodies. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD had indicated that there was a need to ensure flexibility in order to have resources available should meetings or negotiations continue beyond the forecasted time or dates. The report nevertheless stated that that need had now been totally eliminated by the excellent coordination and communication that had developed between the Board secretariat and the Conference Services Division at the United Nations Office at Geneva. Her delegation would like to know how the need had been

"totally" eliminated so that the same could be done in the case of other bodies.

6. **Mr. Saguier Caballero** (Paraguay), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that, while the Group supported the draft calendar of conferences and meetings for 1998, it urged the Secretariat to continue its efforts to ensure that efficient and high-quality conference services were provided by maximizing the utilization of conference-servicing resources. He was gratified to note that the utilization factor exceeded the benchmark of 80 per cent, in particular at Geneva and Vienna. The Chairman of the Committee on Conferences should continue to consult with the chairmen of bodies whose utilization had consistently been below the benchmark with a view to maximizing the use of resources.

7. With regard to the conclusions and recommendations contained in paragraphs 66 to 69 of the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/52/32 and Add.1), an active dialogue should be maintained so as to improve the coordination of conference services. In that connection, he welcomed the innovation of organizing video conferences.

8. While priority must be given to servicing Charter and mandated bodies, the Rio Group attached great importance to the provision of interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings. He noted the slight decrease in the percentage of requests for such services that had been refused, and urged additional efforts to reduce the level of refusals still further.

9. The Rio Group recognized the utility of a cost-accounting system. Regarding the control and limitation of documentation, he reaffirmed the validity of the provisions on the length of reports contained in resolutions 50/206 C and 51/211 B. In that regard, he welcomed the introduction of new technology for the distribution of documents and the efforts to connect all permanent missions to the Internet so as to provide access to the optical disk system. However, electronic dissemination must not replace printed documentation, particularly if that would imply costs that not all Member States had the capacity to absorb.

10. It was imperative, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/11 on multilingualism, to provide the resources needed to maintain the quality of the Organization's system of languages at a high level.

11. In conclusion, he noted the Secretariat's excellent work in providing facilities for bilateral meetings, and welcomed the establishment of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services.

12. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) welcomed the improvement in the utilization of conference services to a level in excess of the benchmark, in particular at Vienna and Geneva. That would allow the Secretariat to improve efficiency and quality and would lead to lower costs. The number of bodies included in the statistical sample should, however, be increased, and should include the Security Council, in particular. The Committee on Conferences had earlier considered the matter, and she asked what stage its review had reached.

13. With regard to subsidiary bodies that had not fully utilized their conference-servicing entitlements, it was important for the mandates and effectiveness of such bodies not to be superficially assessed on the basis of the number of meetings cancelled. For example, any proposal relating to the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization should be made only after substantive analysis by all the members of that Committee. The proposal to reduce the duration of its session to one week had been made by only two delegations, and had not been discussed by the Special Committee.

14. She noted with concern the practice of certain bodies not to use interpretation services, translations of documents and, in some cases, summary records. In that regard, the recent practice of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and of the Committee on the Rights of the Child should be seen as exceptions. The provision of interpretation services to regional and other major groupings was also important, and she noted with concern that 32 per cent of requests for interpretation services for such meetings had been denied over the reporting period. The Secretariat should redouble its efforts to ensure that requests for interpretation services were met.

15. With regard to subsidiary bodies authorized to meet away from their established headquarters (A/52/216 and Add.1), her delegation fully supported the work of the Special Committee on decolonization, and noted the importance of its regional seminars. The Special Committee should be provided with the necessary resources in the next biennium. In that regard, she noted the letter from the Chairman of the Special Committee addressed to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee drawing attention to the Secretary-General's decision to establish a decolonization unit with the necessary resources in the Department of Political Affairs.

16. Regarding the control and limitation of documentation, she noted with concern the proposal that the length of Secretariat documents should be reduced from 24 to 16

pages, and the length of reports of intergovernmental organs from 32 to 20 pages (A/52/291). Those proposals, if implemented, might have a negative effect on quality and political content. She reaffirmed the provisions concerning the length of reports contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/206 C and 51/211 B.

17. She noted that only four of the bodies entitled to written meeting records which had used unedited transcripts had reported to the Committee on Conferences on their experience (A/52/32, para. 94). The others had clearly not replied because they thought it necessary to continue to receive summary records in view of the political sensitivity of their mandates. The matter should not be pressed further. She was concerned about the excessive use of cost-benefit analysis, which did not apply in that situation.

18. She welcomed the efforts to ensure access by all countries, in particular developing countries, to the optical disk system, and to reduce costs. The retention of printed documentation was, however, essential to developing countries, which could not assume any additional costs.

19. The quality of translation and interpretation was vital to the work of the Organization, and she reiterated her delegation's full support for the equal status of the six official languages. She noted with concern the comment in the report of the Committee on Conferences that decreased levels of funding in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 for the recruitment of permanent translation staff and the higher proportion of translations to be outsourced could adversely affect the quality of translation (A/52/32, para. 114). Budgetary constraints were responsible for that state of affairs, and the necessary resources should be provided.

20. With regard to the Joint Inspection Unit report on United Nations publications (A/51/946), the Committee should consider the recommendations of JIU with a view to identifying those which should be implemented.

21. She welcomed the provision of facilities for bilateral meetings during the general debate in the General Assembly.

22. In conclusion, she said she hoped that the programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 would contain appropriations permitting efficient conference services in the interests of facilitating both decision-making by Member States and the work of the Secretariat, which operated under enormous pressure in that area.

23. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Japan) welcomed the improvement in the overall utilization of conference-servicing resources to the extent that the utilization factor had exceeded the benchmark of 80 per cent. He supported the request that the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences should consult the chairmen of bodies which had consistently utilized less than 80 per cent of their allocated resources. Delegations could make a substantial contribution in that regard by being punctual. His delegation placed importance on an active dialogue between Member States and the Secretariat so as to facilitate coordination.

24. He supported the position of the European Union on the control and limitation of documentation. The decision to reduce the maximum length of documents produced by the Secretariat to 16 pages should be respected, and Member States should be encouraged to be more careful in requesting reports. That should ensure stricter compliance with the six-week rule.

25. He welcomed the JIU report on publications, but regretted that, owing to the lack of the Secretary-General's comments thereon, it had not proved possible for the Committee to endorse the JIU recommendations. He asked when those comments would be available.

26. There had been problems in the scheduling and management of meetings of the Commission on Human Rights. Since human rights was a priority area, and in view of the limited resources available, the Commission should streamline the scheduling and management of its meetings. He requested detailed information on the Commission's meetings, including starting and ending times and lists of speakers.

27. **Mr. Shin** (Republic of Korea) said that conference servicing was one of the Organization's primary activities and a significant level of resources was allocated to it. Strengthening the provision of efficient conference services was thus of great concern and he welcomed the decision to establish the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. Integration of the major technical and support services would strengthen conference servicing and engender significant administrative savings. The consequent reductions in posts must not, however, have an adverse impact.

28. He welcomed the fact that the utilization factor for conference-servicing resources had exceeded the benchmark of 80 per cent; that impressive attainment reflected increased efforts by both the Secretariat and Member States, and he trusted that still further improvements could be made. More emphasis should be placed on those bodies which failed to attain the benchmark. His delegation appreciated the role of the Committee on Conferences in helping bodies to make more efficient use of conference-servicing resources.

29. He welcomed the recent video-conferencing initiative, and noted that the optical disk system was now available to all permanent missions. He also welcomed the statement that the groundwork for a cost-accounting system had been laid, and endorsed the view of the Committee on Conferences thereon. Such a system might be expanded to other areas of the Secretariat.

30. He supported the proposed target of a 25-per-cent reduction in documentation produced by the Secretariat by the end of 1998. Member States must cooperate by curtailing requests for reports. The decision to reduce the length of documents originating in the Secretariat to 16 pages deserved support, as did the proposal that intergovernmental bodies should limit the length of their reports to 20 pages.

31. The JIU report on publications (A/51/946) was a well researched and comprehensive survey, and each of the 18 recommendations had merit.

32. Lastly, he expressed concern, despite some tangible progress, about the late submission of documentation, since its timely availability was essential to the deliberations of intergovernmental bodies.

33. **Mr. Blukis** (Chairman of the Committee on Conferences) said that one of the concerns of the Committee on Conferences was to ensure that high quality conference resources were provided and utilized as efficiently and effectively as possible. He was gratified that the Fifth Committee shared the concerns and supported the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee on Conferences. He also welcomed the interest in new technology as a means of improving productivity and cutting costs, and noted the concern to ensure full compliance with the principle of equal treatment of all official languages.

34. Member States could play an important role in promoting the efficient utilization of conference services, not least by ensuring that meetings began and ended on time.

35. Dialogue and coordination were essential to the work of the Committee on Conferences and the Secretariat would conduct briefings with new members of that Committee to familiarize them with its work.

36. Over the past two years the Committee on Conferences, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/206 C, had requested oral reports on certain matters. The experience had been positive and the relevant information provided in those oral reports was included in the Committee's report to the General Assembly.

37. **Mr. Jin** (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services) said that the Committee's discussion of the item had provided the Secretariat with valuable guidance which it would conscientiously follow.

38. The request of the representative of Saudi Arabia for information about the proposed cost-accounting system had been met in document A/C.5/52/CRP.1. The cost of the system, a point raised by the representative of Pakistan, would be substantial, and its operation would require the continual entering of a large volume of data. No separate request for funding was being made since the Secretariat planned to draw on the budgetary provision for technological projects.

39. In response to the question put by the representative of the Bahamas about joint meetings of the Caribbean Community and United Nations secretariats, he drew attention to resolution 51/16. If the General Assembly decided to hold the meetings regularly on a biennial basis, with the next one in 1999, those meetings would be added to the calendar of conferences.

40. The representative of Kenya was right to call for a more balanced distribution of meetings among United Nations conference centres, but such a decision depended on the Member States. Exceptions to the application of the headquarters rule on the venues of meetings were authorized by the General Assembly.

41. Several delegations had raised the question of the provision of services to regional groups and other major groupings of Member States. Conference facilities were provided for such meetings on an "as available" basis pursuant to paragraph 8 of resolution 40/243. No resources were specifically allocated for such meetings, and priority had to be given to meetings included in the calendar of conferences. The Secretariat would, of course, try to provide conference services as far as possible.

42. The Secretariat shared the concern of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and Egypt that the new document formats should not impair legibility. It was trying to develop formats which were easier to read, saved paper and facilitated electronic transmission. It was true that the ageing sound systems in several conference rooms at Headquarters had become a problem. One room had been partially reconditioned in 1997 and resources were being requested in the next biennium for improvements in some other rooms.

43. The Secretariat was fully aware of the provisions of resolution 51/211 C, to which the representative of Pakistan had called attention, and of the importance of uploading important documents to the United Nations Web site. In that connection it was gratifying to note that the Economic and

Social Council, in its resolution 1997/1, had expressed appreciation for the work of the Working Group on Informatics and had welcomed the uploading of the resolutions and decisions adopted by all the main organs since 1946 to the optical disk system. Uploading old documents entailed digitization of materials available only in hard copy or microfiche. Decisions needed to be taken as to which documents were particularly important and on the provision of commensurate additional resources. The representative of Pakistan had also sought an assurance that the level of resources requested for conference services would not adversely affect the quality of documents and other services. Any calculation of the resources required must be based on an assumption, in turn based on recent experience, of what the demand would be. If the Secretariat's projections for the coming biennium were accurate, it should be possible to provide satisfactory services with the resources requested.

44. A number of delegations had referred to the quality of translated documents. The Secretariat regretted any lapses in quality, but the errors should be seen in a statistical perspective: given the huge volume of documents translated, it was virtually impossible to ensure that there were no mistakes. However, not all mistakes were attributable to translators but occurred at other stages of document processing. However, the Secretariat was aware of the need to continue to improve the quality of translation under a continuing heavy workload. It was true that a high rate of self-revision might have an impact on the quality of translation, and a number of measures had been continued or expanded to maintain quality standards in that respect, including monitoring and spot-checking. In-service training of translators and training at summer courses in universities in various parts of the world had also been emphasized with a view to broadening the skills of translators and allowing the Translation Services to handle material on a wide range of topics. Increased contacts between the Translation Services and academic circles had also been encouraged.

45. Translation work done contractually must also meet the Secretariat's quality standards. The rosters of contractors consisted mainly of former United Nations translators familiar with the Organization's terminology and documents, and pressure to expand the rosters by relaxing standards was being resisted. Corporate contractors were selected by anonymous bidding, but account was taken of both the quality of their performance and their rates. In both cases the spot-checking of quality would continue to be expanded.

46. With regard to the accountability of the staff of the language services, there was probably no area in the Organization which allowed for closer monitoring of individual performance. He could assure the Committee that decisions on the careers of language staff closely reflected the detailed appraisals made on the basis of such monitoring.

47. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic had drawn attention to shortcomings in meeting records. Obviously, records must reflect with absolute accuracy the statements delivered by speakers and the decisions of the bodies concerned. In verbatim records the original language version of a statement used the words of the speaker; in the other languages use was made of the interpreters' versions, which were checked against the original language. There was little reliance on interpretation for summary records, which were meant to report the proceedings concisely. Each summary record was drafted entirely in one language and then translated into the other languages. When copies of statements were provided, the exact language and nuances of the speaker were used in the summary record produced in the speaker's language. All records prepared by the Secretariat were subject to correction by delegations. Corrections were not normally issued for individual records but in consolidated corrigenda. The correction requested by the Syrian delegation to a verbatim record of the plenary Assembly would be included in a consolidated corrigendum, the issue of which would be expedited.

48. Referring to the question put by the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and Egypt about the post of the Arabic language teacher in the United Nations Office at Vienna, he said that the question had been passed to the Office of Human Resources Management, which was responsible for language training.

49. He could inform the representative of Egypt that conference services were provided to intergovernmental and expert bodies in accordance with the entitlement authorized by the General Assembly. The Secretariat could not deviate from that entitlement, which could be changed by the General Assembly, usually on the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences.

50. The Secretariat shared the Committee's concern about the late issuance of documents, and efforts were being made to improve the situation. In response to the questions put by the representative of Japan, the Secretariat was trying to find out when the Secretary-General's comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit would be available, and the secretariat of the Commission on Human Rights had been asked to provide detailed data on its meetings, but no reply had yet been received.

51. **Mr. Farid** (Saudi Arabia) said that his delegation could endorse the content of the conference room paper on the cost-accounting system but thought that the Committee

should be provided, through the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), with a report on the implementation of the system by the second part of its resumed fifty-second session. Information about the Secretariat's search for an in-house staff member to supervise the system would also be welcome.

52. *Ms. Incera (Costa Rica), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

53. **Mr. St. Louis** (Office of Human Resources Management) said that for budgetary reasons the entire language training programme at the United Nations Office at Vienna had been abolished by United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) as of 30 June 1997. The United Nations Office had then assumed responsibility for language training in Vienna, but as no resources were available training was provided only on an ad hoc basis. There were two full-time language teachers, for English and French, and four part-time teachers, including one for Arabic. The proposed provision for the next biennium would maintain the two full-time teachers and include some funds for part-time teachers. No answer had been received from Vienna as to why the post of Arabic language teacher had remained vacant for 15 years.

54. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that he would welcome a copy in writing of the statement just made by the Under-Secretary-General for use in the informal consultations. He would also welcome a copy in writing of the statement on the language training service at the United Nations Office at Vienna. Lack of resources was not an acceptable reason for abolishing the service. With respect to the post of Arabic language teacher, he said that a fuller justification was needed in view of the equality of all six official languages.

55. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that, during the discussion of section 2 of the proposed programme budget at the Committee's 19th meeting, she had expressed concern about the delay in the issue of the *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council* and the *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs*. She now understood that publication of the Arabic and Chinese versions of the two publications would be delayed by up to three years. Perhaps the representatives of the Secretariat could throw some light on the matter.

56. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation endorsed the Cuban position. A delay of three years in the issue of the Chinese and Arabic versions of the publications was unacceptable. A further response on the question of the abolition of the language training service should be sought from the United Nations Office at Vienna before the Committee concluded its consideration of the item.

57. **Mr. Jin** (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services) said that the nomination of a staff member to supervise the cost-accounting system would depend on the resources made available in the budget. He did not know the reasons for the delay referred to by the representatives of Cuba and the Syrian Arab Republic but would obtain information as quickly as possible.

Agenda item 116: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 (*continued*) (A/52/6/Rev.1 (Vol. I), A/52/7 (Chap. II, Parts II and III) and A/52/16 and Add.1)

Section 2. Political affairs (*continued*)

Section 3. Peacekeeping operations and special missions (*continued*)

Section 4. Peaceful uses of outer space (*continued*)

58. **Mr. Nour** (Egypt) said that he supported the conclusions and recommendations on section 2 which were contained in the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) (A/52/16). He hoped that the functions of the proposed liaison office to lead the activities of the Department of Political Affairs in Addis Ababa would be included in detail in the proposed budget, in accordance with the recommendation of CPC, and looked forward to receiving further information on the status of that office. He reaffirmed his delegation's belief that special priority should be given to all programmes pertaining to Africa. He fully supported subprogramme 7, Question of Palestine, and asked for assurances that the resources to be allocated to that subprogramme would ensure the full implementation of its activities until a final settlement of the Palestinian question was reached. The proposal to abolish posts in the Division for Palestinian Rights was unjustified.

59. He also supported the conclusions and recommendations of the CPC on section 3. He agreed that staffing issues for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations must be reviewed in their entirety, considering the large number of staff on loan to that Department. The Organization should be able to implement programmes fully without using gratis personnel. The matter should be considered in the context of the proposed cuts in posts and the implementation of General Assembly resolution 51/243.

60. He was concerned about the proposal to make further cuts in posts for the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the United Nations Truce Supervision

Organization (UNTSO), and wanted assurances that the cuts would not affect performance. Because the United Nations played a vital role in maintaining international peace and security, his delegation was prepared to consider any proposals or innovative mechanisms that could ensure the financing of missions which were expected to continue, as long as such financing in no way affected the regular budgetary resources already allocated to programmes and projects under the current budget, especially those concerning development, and adhered strictly to the current budget process, as laid down in General Assembly resolution 41/213.

61. **Mr. Stanislaus** (Grenada), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that CARICOM associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China to the effect that all necessary resources must be provided to carry out the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, which was the main strategic document for programme planning and implementation.

62. Both the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) and the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples had been concerned about the administrative decision to transfer the Organization's Decolonization Programme from the Department of Political Affairs to the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, since they believed it would have jeopardized the political nature of that Programme. Fortunately, after a fruitful dialogue with interested delegations, the Secretary-General had reaffirmed that the Decolonization Programme, which had been a major success, was political in nature. In his letter of 27 October 1997 (A/52/531), he had announced that a stand-alone Decolonization Unit with the necessary resources would be established in the Department of Political Affairs to provide substantive input for the work of the Special Committee. He had also reiterated his commitment to implementing subprogramme 1.6 of the medium-term plan. Thus, the good judgement displayed by the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the Special Committee had resulted in a satisfactory compromise.

63. The Committee should implement the Secretary-General's important decision without delay by approving the staffing and budgetary provisions for the Decolonization Programme in accordance with the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001. Since most of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories were in the Caribbean region, CARICOM attached particular importance to the Special Committee's noble mandate. The ecological crisis in Montserrat illustrated the importance of the Organization's responsibility towards those Territories; the United Nations was Montserrat's last hope for survival. Accordingly, the Decolonization Programme should be given all the necessary human and budgetary resources.

64. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia) said that he fully concurred with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on section 2, subprogramme 7 (Question of Palestine). Considering the importance and sensitivity of the issue, he could not understand the proposal to reduce the resources allocated to that subprogramme. Every effort should be made to resolve the question of Palestine so as to ensure the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

65. Adequate resources should be allocated to enable the General Assembly to convene a fourth special session on disarmament, which had been supported by an overwhelming majority of Member States. With respect to section 4, he firmly supported the proposal to convene UNISPACE III, which should give priority to the promotion of international cooperation and exchanges in space science and advanced technology and to the examination of the latter's impact on the promotion of environmentally sound and sustainable development. The provision of updated information in that field would help to identify the needs of developing countries and facilitate national, regional and international efforts.

66. **Mr. Ayoub** (Iraq) said that his delegation, as a founding member of the Special Committee on Decolonization, fully supported the Special Committee's work and welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to keep the Decolonization Programme in the Department of Political Affairs. The Fifth Committee should approve staffing and budgetary resources for decolonization in accordance with the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999, and should approve the other budget proposals under section 2. Liaison between the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services was important in order to avoid duplication of effort, in line with the current reform process.

67. **Mrs. Emerson** (Portugal) said she trusted that the proposed budget would be modified to reflect the Secretary-General's decision to establish a Decolonization Unit in the Department of Political Affairs.

68. **Mr. Maïga** (Mali) said that he associated himself with the statement made by the delegation of Grenada on behalf of CARICOM. His delegation was a member of the Special Committee and attached great importance to its activities. In the light of the Secretary-General's decision to establish

a Decolonization Unit within the Department of Political Affairs, all necessary resources should be made available to that Unit, in accordance with the priorities and mandates set out in the medium-term plan.

69. **Mr. Riva** (Argentina) and **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) asked when the Secretariat would submit a document on the financial implications of the decision communicated in document A/52/531.

70. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) said, in reply to the representative of Egypt, that additional information on the proposed liaison office at Addis Ababa would be forthcoming. In reply to the question put by the representatives of Argentina and Cuba, he said that the proposed programme budget, as originally submitted, had provided for the funding of the Special Committee under section 2. Subsequently, the Secretary-General had presented the financial implications of his reform proposals in document A/52/303. Instead of modifying that document on a piecemeal basis, the Secretariat would wait until the General Assembly had finished discussing the issue and, in the light of its decisions and any further action by the Secretary-General, would then submit revised financial implications.

71. **Mrs. Emerson** (Portugal) said that it would still be necessary to adjust the amounts being allocated to the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services to reflect the Secretary-General's proposal.

72. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the Controller had not answered the questions he had asked the preceding day. He joined the representative of Egypt in calling for assurances that the elimination of posts in UNTSO would not affect that Organization's performance, and asked why military observer posts were being eliminated from UNTSO. He agreed with the Advisory Committee that the abolition of a P-3 post under subprogramme 7 was unjustified in the light of General Assembly resolution 50/214, part III, paragraph 6. Lastly, with respect to the delay in the issuance of the *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council*, he said he hoped that the savings of $188,000 mentioned in document A/51/873 would help to speed up the publication of the *Repertoire* in the six official languages.

73. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) said that the continued streamlining of the UNTSO administration had involved the reduction of 13 military observer posts, with a corresponding reduction in support staff. That change was not intended to weaken UNTSO, which had a mandate to fulfil. With respect to the P-3 post in the Division for Palestinian Rights, that post had been kept vacant as part of the effort to achieve the savings demanded by the General Assembly. Since the Division had successfully reassigned the functions of that post and carried out its programme of work in 1996-1997, the Secretariat had concluded that the post was unnecessary and had proposed its abolition. The delay in the issuance of the *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council* had already been addressed by the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services.

74. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said he understood that nine of the 13 UNTSO military observer posts which the Secretary-General proposed to abolish belonged to the Observer Group in Egypt; he asked why four other posts were also to be eliminated. He also asked whether the 23 Field Service and Local posts to be abolished related directly to the observers or to other duties.

75. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) said that he would provide information on the remaining military observer posts at a subsequent meeting. The 23 posts referred to by the Syrian representative were support posts relating to the overall operations of UNTSO.

Section 5. International Court of Justice

Section 6. Legal affairs

76. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) introduced the Advisory Committee's report on sections 5 and 6 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 (A/52/7 (Chap. II, Part III)). Paragraphs III.2 to III.12 of its report dealt with the requirements of the International Court of Justice. In paragraph III.5, the Advisory Committee referred to the Secretary-General's proposal to increase resources for general temporary assistance to take the increased workload into account. The Advisory Committee felt that if the workload continued to increase, it might be necessary to examine the cost-effectiveness of using temporary services against that of using staff on board.

77. Paragraphs III.7 and III.8 concerned the processing of documentation. The Advisory Committee recommended that the Court should explore vigorously the introduction of new technology and the experience gained by regional and national judicial systems in that regard, with a view to reducing its backlog. It also believed that the General Assembly should encourage Member States to provide their own pleadings in the official languages of the Court; it had deliberately used the word "encourage", not "require".

78. In paragraph III.9 on the cost of premises, the Advisory Committee noted that the Carnegie Foundation had

requested that the contribution of the United Nations should be increased by 2.5 per cent in each year of the coming biennium. Upon requesting clarification, the Advisory Committee had been informed that the increase was based on the real estate inflation rate at The Hague; the general inflation rate for cost of living applied at The Hague by the United Nations was 1.9 per cent. With respect to the implementation of the recommendations of the External Auditors (para. III.12), the Advisory Committee noted that the Registrar had provided clarification concerning some of the External Auditors' observations and that measures had been taken to address their concerns.

79. With regard to section 6, Legal affairs, the Advisory Committee had noted that the International Law Commission was considering whether to split one of its sessions between New York and Geneva. A number of factors needed to be taken into account before such a request was granted, not least of which was the fact that meeting capacity at Headquarters was already saturated.

80. The Advisory Committee welcomed the fact that the Office of Legal Affairs planned to eliminate the backlog of the *Treaty Series* in three years. The Committee had also recommended approval of the proposal to reclassify a regular budget post from the D-1 to the D-2 level, thereby accommodating the Director and Deputy to the Legal Counsel (para. III.20). The latter currently occupied a D-2 post funded from extrabudgetary resources, which would accordingly be downgraded to the D-1 level. In view of the functions of the post, it would be more appropriate to fund it from the regular budget.

81. The abolition of six Professional posts and three General Service posts had been proposed in connection with subprogramme 4 (Law of the sea and ocean affairs), in view of the restructuring of the programme of work related to the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (para. III.21). The Advisory Committee believed that the heavy workload in the Office of Legal Affairs actually warranted additional staff; it was therefore curious that a reduction was being proposed.

82. The report of the Secretary-General on United Nations reform (A/52/303) had been issued subsequent to the Advisory Committee's consideration of its draft report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999. The financial consequences of the Secretary-General's actions and recommendations relating to section 6 would be the reclassification of a D-2 post in the Office of the Legal Counsel to the Assistant Secretary-General level with a subsequent increase before recosting. The Advisory Committee intended to revert to consideration of document A/52/303 in due course.

83. **Mr. Chinvanno** (Thailand), Vice-Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, introducing the relevant sections of that Committee's report (A/52/16), said that section 5 was not a programme and had therefore not been considered by CPC. CPC recommended that the General Assembly should approve the programme narrative of section 6 subject to the modification contained in its report. The Secretary-General's reform proposals contained in document A/52/303 had been considered by the Committee at its resumed session and its observations thereon had been issued as document A/52/16/Add.1. That document would be introduced in due course.

84. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America), referring to section 5, asked the Secretariat to indicate where in the budget his delegation could find the amount allocated for the maintenance and operation of the renovated dining room at the International Court of Justice. Given that the Court's premises had been expanded and rental costs were therefore higher, his delegation would be grateful for more information on whether any downward adjustments had been made as a result of recosting changes made in the current biennium. The Chairman of the Advisory Committee should explain exactly who had provided the assurance referred to in paragraph III.12 of the Advisory Committee's report in reference to the Court's travel estimates.

85. Section 6 was for the most part consistent with the medium-term plan and the Organization's priorities in the legal field. However, his delegation hoped that adjustments could be made to take account of more recent developments such as the adoption by the General Assembly of the Convention on the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, which was mentioned as an activity under paragraph 6.64 of the proposed programme budget. His delegation supported continuing efforts to bring the Organization's legal publications up to date. It also endorsed redeployment of resources from the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea to other areas within the Office of Legal Affairs; that was entirely appropriate in the light of the changing institutional structure of matters relating to the Law of the Sea. It seemed that further staff reductions and redeployments would also be possible.

86. His delegation appreciated the efforts that were being made to eliminate the backlog in the United Nations *Treaty Series*. Paragraph 6.27 of the proposed programme budget referred to costs for external printing. In that connection, the Secretariat should provide further details on whether the shift to repro-copying and desk-top publishing of treaties

could be accomplished more expeditiously in order to save additional external printing costs.

87. Since it was claimed that the possibility of the International Law Commission holding a split session would have only a marginal effect on costs, his delegation wished to know specifically what the cost comparison was. Further details should also be provided regarding attendance at meetings of the International Law Commission; specifically, the Secretariat should explain whether the budgets for travel and subsistence were based on a presumption of 100-per-cent attendance. Finally, the Chairman of the Advisory Committee should explain the basis for his statement that meeting capacity in New York was saturated.

88. His delegation wished to know more about the anticipated uses of the $41,300 requested for consultants and experts under subprogramme 1 and about the $65,300 requested for travel, in particular why the latter figure had increased in comparison with the current biennium. Similarly, under subprogramme 3, more details should be provided about the increased amount requested for travel and stipends for 32 fellowships. Specifically, the number of fellowships awarded during the current biennium should be disclosed for purposes of comparison.

89. *Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh), Chairman, resumed the Chair.*

90. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that the Secretariat should indicate what functions had previously been carried out by the posts under section 5 which it proposed to leave vacant.

91. With regard to section 6, her delegation was concerned about the delay in the publication of the *Treaty Series*. Appropriate financial and human resources should be provided to overcome the problem. Her delegation was also concerned about the increase in resources that had been requested for hiring experts; every effort should be made to avoid additional expenditures in that regard. It was also concerned about the reduction of three regular budget posts compared with the previous biennium. The Secretariat should justify the need for the reclassification.

92. Paragraph 6.23 made reference to overtime, which should be expressed quantitatively. In paragraph 6.38, her delegation was puzzled why reference had been made to resources relating to peacekeeping missions. The Secretariat should explain why no reference had been made to the Committee on Relations with the Host Country in subprogramme 3. While supporting the use of resources to cover the cost of travel and stipends for fellowships, as outlined in paragraph 6.71, her delegation would nevertheless appreciate a quantitative comparison with the previous biennium. It was disturbing that a significant reduction of posts was proposed in subprogramme 4. Such important functions should be carried out by experienced staff members on permanent contracts.

93. **Mr. Herrera** (Mexico) said that his delegation was concerned that the Secretary-General had proposed further cuts in the United Nations teaching programme designed to encourage the dissemination and wider appreciation of international law. Seminars, practical courses and grants in respect of international law were important, and they had already been subject to cutbacks in the current biennium. Such activities should at least be allocated the same level of resources as they currently enjoyed.

94. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia) said that his delegation supported subprogramme 4, (Law of the sea and ocean affairs) but was concerned that it did not adequately reflect what had been agreed in the medium-term plan. The programmatic aspect of the subprogramme should reflect more accurately what had been decided.

95. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the assurance referred to in paragraph III.12 of the Committee's report had been given by the Registrar. With regard to the contention that meeting capacity at Headquarters was saturated, he referred the representative of the United States to the comments in paragraph VIII.145 of the Advisory Committee's report (A/52/7 (Chap. II, Part VIII)), wherein it was stated that the Committee was informed that during 1995 and 1996 the numbers of meetings requested with interpretation in New York that could not be accommodated were 202 and 174 respectively.

96. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) said that financial provision for the small dining facility at the International Court of Justice could be found in paragraph 5.22 of the proposed programme budget under the contribution payable to the Carnegie Foundation by the United Nations for its share of general operating expenses. The rent payable for the Court's premises was indeed adjusted in dollars whenever recosting was carried out. The costs of the International Law Commission were based on 80 per cent attendance.

97. Although the Secretariat was keen to speed up production of the United Nations *Treaty Series*, it was currently not in a position to accelerate the process any further. Additional funds for consultancy fees and travel had been proposed in response to a request from the Office of the Legal Counsel where experience had shown such expenditure to be necessary in the course of its work. The references to peacekeeping missions in the context of section

6 were in respect of personnel from the Office of Legal Affairs travelling abroad to discuss, *inter alia*, the legal aspects of status-of-forces agreements.

98. On the question of fellowships, the small increase proposed in the budget was an attempt to restore funding to its former level following the cuts that had been made in that area in the previous budget.

99. Matters relating to the Committee on Relations with the Host Country were handled by the Office of the Legal Counsel and as such were dealt with in paragraph 6.35, subparagraph b (iii) of the proposed programme budget. Finally, concern had been expressed about the significant reduction in the number of posts under subprogramme 4. Those reductions could be explained by the fact that a number of functions relating to the Law of the Sea which until recently had been performed by the United Nations were no longer the responsibility of the Organization; it had thus been possible to reduce the number of posts.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.